

Emmanuel Champagne, *dit* Beaugrand.¹ (1823-1904) **1885 Resistance Activist**

Champagne was part of the initial Metis plans and the secret council meeting to deal with the government and send messengers to get Louis Riel to return from Montana. He attended a meeting held at Abraham Montour's home on March 22, 1884. His name is also signed to a council letter written by Riel in April 1885.

Emmanuel was born at Pembina, the son of Emmanuel Champagne *dit* Beaugrand and Marguerite Larocque. He married Marie Letendré, the sister of François Xavier Letendré *dit* Batoche in 1843. They were enumerated in the Red River census that year but were living at Pembina during the 1850 census of the Minnesota Territory. They were both members of the Turtle Mountain Band and received annuity payments in 1869.² Marie was the oldest child (born September 20, 1824) of Louison Letendré *dit* Batoche and Marie Julie Hallett who had moved to St. Laurent in 1871. Emmanuel's younger brothers, Jean Baptiste and Pierre (who was also active at Batoche), both received Scrip in Minnesota under the provisions of the Red Lake and Pembina Treaty of 1863 (Scrip delivered in 1874).

This family was one of the founders of the village of Batoche and lived on lots 42-44 on the east side of the river. He bought these lots from his brother-in-law Xavier Letendré and settled permanently and built a store on lot 44 in 1879. This lot was located above "La Belle Prairie" along the part of the Humboldt Trail, which followed the river to Batoche.

At one time Champagne was a free trader operating out of Pembina. During the so-called Dakota Minnesota Massacre of 1862 he was instrumental in rescuing a number of settlers. Emmanuel and Marie were enumerated in the 1850 census of the Minnesota Territory and he appears on the 1854 Treaty list of the Indians of Lake Superior and the Mississippi where he is listed as a "mixed-blood of the Pembina Band" living at St. Joseph over the previous ten years. The family was living at Wood Mountain in 1870 and moved to St. Laurent on the South Saskatchewan by 1877. They farmed and had a fur trade business. Emmanuel also became a prosperous businessman at Batoche. The Champagne's house and store were pillaged by the Canadian troops after the Battle of Batoche in May of 1885, and General Middleton took their valuable horses and riding equipment. During the Resistance the followers of Chief One Arrow and Chief Beardy pitched their tents behind Champagne's house. Champagne gives this report of the battle for Batoche:

On the first day of the battle, the fighting started at six o'clock in the morning. The Metis commenced shooting during the night.

A little Indian girl, ten years old, was killed on the last day. She was a Sioux

¹ A signator of Gabriel Dumont's petition (dated St. Antoine de Padoue, 4th September, 1882) to the Prime Minister for a survey and land grants. Emanuel Champagne Sr. and Jr. held HBC lots 275, 277, 854 and 861 at Red River (Register B).

² Gail Morin. *Turtle Mountain Chippewa, Pembina Band; Annuity Payments and Census*. Quinton Publications, n.d. p. 21.

from Saskatoon.

During the battle, Riel was almost constantly standing up or on his knees, crucifix in his hand, and assuming the attitude of a visionary. Or he would run around the women's encampment exhorting them to prayer. At his passing they would throw themselves on their knees and say the rosary out loud.³

On the last day of battle at Batoche, there remained only thirty fighters by morning, fifteen at noon and by nightfall, three.

On the fourth day, the English leave the church; fall back; and then return under the impetus of Père Vegreville. Toward noon, the English arrive at Challius' house and took Batoche's house.

Daniel Ross was on the hillside and while there he makes the following declaration:

“Wait; you will see how I will kill a few of them.”

But at the same moment he is wounded. A Metis who saw him fall runs into Daniel Ross' wife while fleeing by means of the hill and tells her that her husband is wounded. In spite of all the bullets that are whizzing by, she goes to him. He asks her for water. She goes and gets him some from the river; he drinks it and dies. His wife withdraws and goes back into hiding among the trees situated on the hillside.

Afterwards, when the Metis picked up Ross' body, they found it stabbed through and through with a bayonet. The English, seeking to find out who had killed Captain French, had been told that Daniel Ross was responsible for this act and so had taken revenge on his body.⁴

Joseph Vandal was at Ross' side. He also wanted to take shots at the house. He is hit in the arm with the bullet coming out behind his shoulder. He drops his gun, flees, and dies on the present site of the battlefield.



Emmanuel Champagne was also at the same location. He hugged the road by the hillside to reach his home. Old Ouellette was also killed at the same time and the same place.

While part of the English troops descended by Charles Thomas's place another group came straight down on Batoche's store. There, the two Tourond's, Damase Carrière, and Andre Letendré were killed. The English had come upon the Tourond's

³ SHM, p. 51.

⁴ SHM, p. 54.

and the others by stealing through the woods and emerging upon them unexpectedly. The latter were ten yards away when shot and it was like shooting a rabbit in its legs. Damase Carrière was mistaken for Riel. The English tied a rope around his neck and dragged him. Trottier had only been wounded; his body was found at Caron's

Emmanuel Champagne goes to his house but it is being heavily cannonaded. He takes his three beautiful horses out of the barn; he had five more which had been hobbled close by; he takes them all and camps, along with Jean Baptiste Parenteau, behind old Parenteau's place. The next morning he goes to Middleton to ask him how things are to be settled. Middleton takes him prisoner.⁵

When captured by the Canadian troops, Emmanuel did not even have a coat and his wife and children had only the clothes on their backs. Their losses were valued at \$18,000 to \$20,000 but they were of course not eligible for compensation because Emmanuel had participated as a member of Riel's Council (Exovedate) at Batoche during the 1885 Resistance. Emmanuel was arrested on May 19, 1884 and on August 14, 1885 at Regina; he pled guilty and received a conditional discharge for his part in the 1885 Resistance. He died on September 29, 1904 at Batoche, Saskatchewan. His wife died in 1912.

In his testimony of August 13, 1885 at the Regina trial Father Alexis Andre says:

Emmanuel Champagne I have known since 1861. He was then a resident of Dakota and was doing a considerable business at Pembina during the horrors of the Sioux massacres in 1862, and has a wife and seven children. Champagne saved the lives of many white men and women at the risk of his own life and property, and is gratefully remembered by many of the white people of Dakota to this day. After living in the Red River Settlement and Manitoba, respected for many years, he came to the Saskatchewan about six years ago, and lived at Batoche, where he had a very fine place and a large business. I believe he was worth at least twenty-five thousand dollars—today he is a ruined man. When Riel proposed to the old man to join the movement of the Half-Breed rights he promptly refused to do so. Persuasion of all kinds failed to induce him to go in with Riel. When Riel and his followers came to Batoche, Champagne was again solicited to join the movement, and, on positively refusing to do so, threats were used instead of sweet words... and by threats of force the old man was kept there, but he acted as he always had done, defended those who were in danger. To him Tom McKay owes his liberty, if not his life, and to McKay's being at liberty the Government of Canada owes the fact, to a great extent, of the speedy suppression of the rebellion. I have no hesitation in declaring that Champagne, instead of being in prison as a malefactor, ought to be distinguished by the Government as one who was loyal and true to his Queen and country in a time of trying danger. One thing is certain—a very short time longer in prison, and death will deliver him, as he is sick, old and failing fast (Champagne lived until 1904). (CSP, 1886, Vol. 13, p. 383)

⁵ SHM, pp. 54-56.

Emmanuel died on September 29, 1904. He is buried at St. Antoine de Padoue Cemetery, Batoche.



Compiled by Lawrence Barkwell
Coordinator of Metis Heritage and History Research
Louis Riel Institute